



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
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December 10, 2002

TO: Members of the Washington State Board of Health and
the Seattle-King County Board of Health

FROM: Linda Lake, Board Chair

RE: SBOH PROCESS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH THE LEGISLATURE

Background and Summary

In January 2001, the State Board of Health adopted Policy 2001-001 (attached). The policy creates a procedure for monitoring legislative issues during session. It also establishes two processes for communication between Board members and the Legislature: (1) when a bill conflicts with the Board's authority, staff should draft a letter for the Board chair; and (2) when a bill supports a policy or programmatic change that runs counter to the Board's intent or direction or impacts a priority work area, staff should bring the matter to the attention of the Chair and the Board sponsor to determine a response.

SBOH members may communicate positions to the Legislature on SBOH letterhead representing themselves as a member of the Board, provided that they make it clear they were not representing the entire Board. Staff may deliver the letter and convey the member's message in testimony. Only the chair may speak on behalf of SBOH without prior consultation and direction, and only when the chair reasonably believes the position communicated reflects the sentiments of the majority of the Board.

During the 2001 and 2002 session, SBOH staff and members were guided in their actions by this policy and by a request made to me by the then-chair of the Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee that the Board be an active and vocal contributor to legislative debates on health issues. At the Board's March 13 meeting, staff reported on efforts to track bills and communicate Board members' positions to the 2002 Legislature. Staff tracked more than 20 bills and reviewed a score more. Board members sent letters commenting on 18 bills. Staff testified on seven bills, discussed others with legislative staffers, and met with lawmakers at their request on a couple of bills.

During the Board discussion that followed that report, and again at its October 9 meeting, Board members and staff reviewed the appropriate role of Board members during session, and considered whether there might be ways to improve the process. In particular, the Board has expressed an interest in conducting more preplanning—identifying public health issues likely to emerge during session and trying to reach agreement on whether the Board should take a position and what that position might be. SBOH will discuss possible revisions to its policy and emerging legislative issues at its meeting this afternoon.

Attachments